



BuSpar (buspirone)

Generic name: Buspirone

Available strengths: 5 mg, 7.5 mg, 15 mg, 30 mg tablets

Available in generic: Yes

Drug class: Nonbenzodiazepine/antianxiety agent

General Information

BuSpar (buspirone) is an antianxiety medication indicated for management of selected anxiety disorders or for short-term relief of anxiety symptoms. It is not chemically related to the benzodiazepines (e.g., Valium) or barbiturates. In addition, unlike those medications, BuSpar neither produces prominent sedation nor significantly interferes with memory or cognition. The major advantage of BuSpar is its low abuse potential. It is not regulated as a controlled medication like the benzodiazepines and barbiturates. It does not appear to induce dependence, making it the better choice for individuals with a history of alcoholism and substance abuse. Moreover, unlike benzodiazepines, BuSpar does not require gradual tapering before discontinuation but may be abruptly stopped without withdrawal symptoms.

BuSpar's effectiveness for treating anxiety may be explained by its pharmacological action in the brain at specific receptor sites. *Receptors* are specific sites on the nerve cell membrane that receive a signal from a neurochemical called the **neurotransmitter**. Once a neurotransmitter locks in on the receptor, the neurochemical signal is changed to an electrical or another chemical signal and travels down the neuron. BuSpar's ability to relieve anxiety may be due to its action on serotonin receptors, by altering serotonin-receptor sensitivity at a specific serotonin receptor subtype (**5-HT_{1A}**). In contrast to benzodiazepines, which affect other types of receptors (in particular, **γ-aminobutyric acid** [GABA]), BuSpar does not have anticonvulsant or muscle relaxant effects.

Dosing Information

The usual starting dosage for BuSpar is 5 mg two or three times a day (10–15 mg/day), with increases of 5 mg/day at intervals of 2–3 days to an optimal therapeutic dosage of 20–30 mg/day in divided doses. The maximum dosage should not exceed 60 mg/day.

Common Side Effects

The common side effects associated with BuSpar are headaches, dizziness, and drowsiness. These side effects occur frequently shortly after initiating therapy but usually subside in about 1 week of therapy. Unlike benzodiazepines, BuSpar is less sedating and does not appear to impair cognition and coordination. However, some individuals who may be particularly sensitive to the central nervous system (CNS) effects of the medication or who metabolize it slowly may experience nervousness and excitement. Overall, BuSpar has very few troublesome side effects and is generally well tolerated.

Adverse Reactions and Precautions

Individuals, particularly seniors, should be aware of how BuSpar affects their alertness and coordination and observe caution while driving or performing other tasks requiring alertness. Some individuals may be especially sensitive to the CNS adverse effects (e.g., dizziness) of the medication.

Prolonged use of BuSpar is not known to lead to dependence. The medication may be abruptly withdrawn without inducing withdrawal symptoms. For most people, BuSpar does not appear to have any significant interaction with alcohol and does not intensify alcohol's sedative effects. Unlike benzodiazepines, which are centrally acting depressants and can depress respiration, BuSpar does not have this effect and will not affect respiration. It is safe for patients with chronic obstructive pulmonary disease and emphysema, as well as for patients with sleep apnea—a sleep disorder in which respiration is interrupted by long pauses during the sleep cycle.

BuSpar should not be taken with a type of antidepressant called **monoamine oxidase inhibitors** (MAOIs). The combination can precipitate a dangerous elevation of blood pressure.

Possible Drug Interactions

There are few significant drug interactions reported with BuSpar; those reported are summarized in the table below.

erythromycin, Biaxin (clarithromycin), TAO (Troleandomycin)	The combination of BuSpar with these antibiotics may inhibit the metabolism of BuSpar and lead to adverse side effects.
Nizoral (ketoconazole), Sporanox (itraconazole)	The combination of BuSpar with these antifungal agents may inhibit the metabolism of BuSpar and increase the likelihood of adverse side effects.
Serzone (nefazodone)	Serzone may markedly increase the blood levels of BuSpar and increase the likelihood of adverse side effects.
Monoamine oxidase inhibitors (MAOIs) (e.g., Marplan, Parnate, and Nardil)	Antidepressants known as MAOIs should not be combined with BuSpar. There have been reports of elevated blood pressure when BuSpar was added to medication regimens including an MAOI.

Use in Pregnancy and Breastfeeding: Pregnancy Category B

The use of BuSpar during pregnancy has not been clinically studied, and our understanding of its risks is limited. BuSpar should be avoided during pregnancy, especially in the first trimester. The use of BuSpar during pregnancy should be considered only when the need for the medication outweighs its risk and alternative therapies have failed.

Nursing mothers should not take BuSpar, because it will pass into breast milk and be ingested by the baby. If stopping the drug is not an alternative, breastfeeding should not be started or should be discontinued.

Overdose

No deaths have been reported from overdoses with BuSpar alone. Nausea, vomiting, drowsiness, and stomach upset were reported by patients who took more than five times the maximum dosage of BuSpar. However, the combination of BuSpar with other CNS depressants in overdose may result in more severe symptoms.

Any suspected overdose should be treated as an emergency. The person should be taken to the emergency department for observation and treatment. The prescription bottle of medication (and any other medication suspected in the overdose) should be brought as well, because the information on the prescription label can be helpful to the treating physician in determining the number of pills ingested.

Special Considerations

- If you miss a dose, take it as soon as possible, but if it is close to the next scheduled dose, skip the missed dose and continue on your regular dosing schedule. Do not take double doses.
- BuSpar may be taken with or without food.
- BuSpar may cause sedation and drowsiness, especially during initiation of therapy, and impair your alertness. Use caution when driving or performing tasks that require alertness. Avoid alcohol when taking BuSpar, because alcohol may intensify these effects.
- Store the medication in its originally labeled, light-resistant container, away from heat and moisture. Heat and moisture may precipitate breakdown of your medication.
- Keep your medication out of reach of children.

If you have any questions about your medication, consult your physician or pharmacist.

